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OCTOBER 2011 – MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (MADS): VISIONARY INSTITUTIONAL REFORM TO PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The USAID Public Policy Program (the Program) provides technical assistance to the Government of Colombia (GOC) to support it develop, design, implement and execute crucial constitutional, legal, public policy and institutional reforms. With the purpose of assisting the GOC increase governance capacity to accomplish its ambitious reform agenda, the Program offers expert guidance on policies and programs that improve institutional effectiveness and efficiency.

On May 4, 2011, the Colombian Congress granted President Santos six months of extraordinary powers to “issue decrees with the force of law” in order to reorganize the structure of the GOC’s Ministries. Following this conferral of special authority, the Program received a request from the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development (MAVDT) to assist develop studies to support the institutional reform for the creation of the new Environmental and Sustainable Development Ministry (MADS).

To further the GOC’s goal of creating a new independent Ministry capable of fulfilling its vision of building social equity through environmental management and sustainable development, the Program drafted and delivered a technical document to the GOC in August 2011.

In this document, the Program advocated for a new and modern Ministry that is able to respond to climate change and manage risk in response to extreme climate variability, as well as suggested ways the GOC could craft a new Ministry capable of dealing with the everyday pressures of economic development activities on ecosystems. The Program proposed a solid institutional framework for the GOC to guide Colombian society towards a high level of economic growth, development, and sustainability.

The Program’s technical document contained the general strategy, scope and guidelines to support the institutional reform of the MADS. The input included mission objectives, agency processes, an operational model, an internal structure of the Ministry, and a draft decree for the establishment of the new MADS. In addition, the Program delivered information on the legal inputs required to support the separation of the three former Ministries and the definition of the new Ministry.

The Program’s strategic document was used as a basis for the decree regulating the new MADS, issued by the Santos Administration on September 27. Decree 3570 of 2011 established the MADS’ organizational structure and functions, arranging the Ministry into four main bodies: the Office of the Ministry; the Office of the Vice-Ministry; the General Secretary; and, Consulting Bodies (Organs, Committees, and Coordinating and Advisory Committees). The Vice-Ministry’s Office’s includes a group exclusively devoted to climate change issues.

The MADS reform represents an important accomplishment for the Santos Administration, and also symbolizes an historic advance for the modernization of the Colombian State. The USAID Public Policy Program's contribution to the design and establishment of the new MADS will enable the GOC to promote responsible environmental management and sustainable development.